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AN EXPLANATION OF FIVE THESIS PAINTINGS

by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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In this portion of my thesis I am attempting to speak objectively about five of my paintings: Self-Portrait with Rain Hat, Figures Three, Man at Table, Two Nudes, and Composition Jimmy. An explanation of the technical processes of the figure paintings is my primary concern. I have intentionally evaded a discussion of the purpose of my paintings because as a young painter I have not crystalized a philosophy of art. Each work originated in a different manner and evolved to a finished product representing a solution to a problem in creativity. Two media, oil and acrylic polymer paint, were used to portray these figures. Presented in chronological order the painter intends to show growth through five examples of artistic endeavor spanning a one-year study. The thesis includes an introduction, an account of the technical approach to the above mentioned paintings, and a catalogue of works in the exhibit accompanied by color slides.



#### AN EXPLANATION OF FIVE THESIS PAINTINGS

From the thesis exhibition of May 23, 1965, in Weatherspoon Gallery I have chosen to elucidate upon five of the fifteen paintings included in my show. The written document is presented as a part of the thesis, and the quintet of paintings discussed were selected by the artist because they represent a wide range of working manners. All were painted in a basement studio with artificial light in mid-afternoon. The amount of time spent on each painting varied from fifteen minutes to four or five hours.

Self-Portrait with Rain Hat originated from a felt pen sketch with large eyes that stared back at me while I posed before a mirror. Unlike the majority of my work this painting depended on the sketch for the enlarged reproduction onto the canvas and for a sense of the light and dark areas. The canvas which I chose was given to me by a fellow painter and formerly had been used for a collage of plaster and tissue paper. I continued with the collage effect after placing my three-quarter view sketch in the center of this larger-than-life size canvas. The sketch was begun in earth colors as my original decision was to execute the composition in siennas, ochres, and umbers. However, as the painting developed the subdued browns gave way to the bright greens, red oranges, and blues. To act as texture tissue paper and cotton cloth were placed on the painting surface and adhered by Elmer's Glue-All. The value range of the self-portrait began in middle-toned washes of color around the linear drawing of the face and shoulders. This process

gave me more flexibility to decide the changes in the value and the intensity. By using the middle-keyed washes the painting surface was more quickly and economically covered. In this self-portrait I used one large flat brush that resulted in a repetitious pattern of brush strokes. A light source is obvious in the upper left corner as it "shines" on the face; however, light becomes a flickering substance that is repeated in a centrifugal movement - here in the pale greens, there as a white or beige. Color was added in patchwork opaqueness increasing in intensity while using a full palette: burnt sienna, cadmium red light, cadmium (barium) yellow, thalo green, ultramarine blue, alizarin crimson, and white. These hues are repeated over and over as they swirl around and into the face breaking up the original form or outline drawing of the figure. Such a technique gives the viewer a feeling of the face slowly emerging from pure color fog. None of the initial oil sketch remains, for line is subordinated to shape which interprets and interrupts the form, the expected appearance of a bust portrait.

I consider Self-Portrait with Rain Hat a successful finish that is complete in its rugged textural treatment and color development. My intention to portray myself from a life drawing materialized into a monumental portrayal that represents a desire to show myself as a distant distracted individual peering through a polychromatic cloud.

Figures Three evolved from three chalk sketches of nudes done in a life drawing class and chosen because they appealed to me as a compositional motif. By stapling my three pastels to the wall beside my easel I drew the composition onto a grey-tinted preprimed canvas. In the drawing on the canvas I varied the proportion of the figures and

enlarged the nude on the right while overlapping the middle female. This proportion change gives the impression that the first figure is looming over the middle one. Again, as in Self-Portrait with Rain Hat, an oil line was initially used followed by middle-valued washes. This technique is exemplified in the lower left corner and gives the painting a more varied textural surface by exposing the weave of the fabric in areas. The left figure in profile minus her head and feet was painted in large patterns and evolved quickly as did the ochre negative shape beside her. On the left side few changes were made while I was painting, but the two nudes on the right occupied more attention and time because I was stroking with a small brush and perhaps twenty colors to define the back muscles and body contours. Light is again repressed in favor of color. Where light areas appear, they operate as a change in value, or to add emphasis, not to denote a definite source of light.

To me Figures Three represents a problem in composition and color. In this work I attempted to contrast the single verticality of the left nude with the roundness and compact grouping of the two females on the right. The color is warm, active, and varied in brush stroke size. While defining the figures, the color exists separate from the subject matter and subordinates the three women to forms in pigment.

Man at Table possesses a deceptive title as it is actually a self-portrait with a still life. On the same type of pre-primed canvas used to paint Figures Three, I began by aimlessly drawing a circle that later became the yellow table. By using thinned oil paint, I cut through the circle by means of the following: a figure at the top middle, a loaf of bread, and two vases. In an attempt to simplify I painted the outside

edges with a cerulean blue wash. The upper right corner remains as the only example of this action. Opaque color patches and swirls became the dominant motif with a concentration on the central figure and vases. The loaf of bread no longer contains a recognizable form but is shown as a nest of browns, blues, yellows, and reds. The "simple yellow" table which has been turned upwards to give a flattened effect and an awareness of the picture plane becomes to the viewer a multiplex of cadmiums ranging from red to pale yellow-green. Although a few edges can be found, no longer is an absolute circle obvious. The table and the background merge into pigmented patches that act as surface coloring to the important middle section. From repeated brush strokes a structural resemblance to my face evolves at the top looking downward on hands lost behind the two vases. Pure brilliant tube colors act as variation, and value change exists only when white has been mixed with red, blue, or yellow. No black was used in this painting, a fact true of most of my works.

Man at Table loses its continuity of composition by a certain arbitrariness of brush technique. The challenge of the circle shape was exciting. However, the problem of the four corners was never quite resolved. By alternating brush sizes and eliminating the overlapping collection of color spots on the left side I feel that the importance and organization of the middle section could be improved.

In Two Nudes the multiplicity of the repeated brush stroke has been handled with a degree of sedateness and, therefore, presents a more controlled finished product. I began with a sized linen canvas primed with Elmer's Glue-All and water which dried to a clear finish thus giving me the grey-brown of the linen as a background. This priming seems to have



given a more translucent effect to the pigments. Through premeditated decisions I sketched the two female torsos onto the rectangular canvas so that they dominated the space in larger-than-life size. The space between them became an abstracted interior of piled shapes diagonally shifting in an upwards movement. Thin washes were quickly mixed with damar varnish medium applied with a number 12 sable-hair flat brush. The medium consists of four parts damar varnish, four parts turpentine, and one part linseed oil. Care was taken to execute the drawing in correct body proportions and to retain the outline of the figures. By executing the frontal figure in cool blue-greens and the turned female in warm reds and greens a contrast was set up. Areas were first painted in a solid hue and then varied by linear shapes glazed over them. These last painted spots are usually a variation of the same color but a contrasting color might appear. To me a more varied value range is evidenced in Two Nudes, but light is still scattered over the figures and their background with no reasonable source. A repetition of the upward growing patterns of the middle section is seen on the torsos of the women. Details such as hair, ears, and fingers have been eliminated to show the lack of their importance to this artist when in the presence of brilliant, lucid color.

I consider this painting, Two Nudes, a well-planned aggregation of color on canvas.

Unlike the above mentioned paintings Composition Jimmy began with a pencil drawing from a model. After the quick sketch done on smooth-finished poster board the model remained in his relaxed pose while I washed over the surface with yellow-green acrylic polymer applied with

an inch and a half brush. A whitish burnt sienna was placed on the left arm and face and continued down to the right arm. Anxious to finish before the sitter tired I added a rosey pink to the hair, a fold in the sweater and the right hand. For darks I used burnt sienna and Hooker's green. To give intensity a pure red at the neck and sleeve and medium yellow on the right sleeve were applied. Just as my subject was about to break the pose I added the cadmium orange for the left hand, more green for details of the figure. The yellow-green background suddenly faded with the lavish color on the figure and I repainted it with a darker, more opaque green after my model moved.

The fifteen minutes of urgency to capture a figure is the primary element that gives Composition Jimmy an unvarying directness of immediate purpose. The rapidity of the acrylic polymer's drying gave spontaneity and freshness. The color selection was impromptu and relied entirely on responsive judgment not on didactic intellectualism.

# CATALOGUE

1. Self-Portrait with Rain Hat
2. Figures Three
3. Man at Table
4. Two Nudes
5. Composition Jimmy
6. Blue Lady
7. Untitled
8. Figure Stripe
9. Nameless Painting
10. K. L.
11. Heublin
12. Composition #1
13. Figure Study I
14. Figure Study II
15. Figure Study III